

From its behaviour and call-notes I had no doubt that it was one of a family of Grey-headed Wagtails that were with it.

Had it not been for the locality in which it was seen it would have been impossible to separate it from similar variants which have been described for the Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava flavissima* (Blyth). Smith (1950) has a coloured illustration of a pair of such birds seen in Norfolk in 1941. The cock has some degree of yellow colour on the underside and head, but the hen shows none.

I saw a similar hen at Mitcham in Surrey on 24th May 1947, and Milne (1959) records one at Beddington in Surrey in 1957.

There has been a tendency to associate such birds with those which show abnormal head colouration. But the latter varies within the genus, resulting in visible specific differences: Milne (op. cit.) suggests that the abnormal head colouration is the result of intraspecific breeding.

The variant plumage already described appears to be independent of head colouration, and seems to be the result of the absence of a brown pigment in the plumage as a whole.

In many psittacine birds the mainly green colour of the feathers is the result of the combination of a yellow pigment and a blue structural colour in each feather. These are inherited through different genes and it is possible to breed birds which possess one and not the other, being either yellow or blue.

It seems possible that something similar may occur in these wagtails, the olive-brown of the back being a combination of brown and blue-grey, each controlled by a different gene. The yellow colour appears to be either linked with the blue-grey, or independent of either.

References:—

Smith, Stuart. *The Yellow Wagtail*. London 1950.

Milne, B. S. Variation in a population of Yellow Wagtails. *Brit. Birds* 52 (1959): 281–295.

The Kurrichane Thrush *Turdus libonyanus tropicalis* Peters a host of the Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius* Stephens in Southern Rhodesia

by CHARLES R. S. PITMAN

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There appears to be no previous published record of the Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius* victimizing the Kurrichane Thrush *Turdus libonyanus*. In a communication received from Mr. H. M. Miles, who is the Organising Secretary in Southern Rhodesia of the South African Ornithological Society Nest Record Scheme, he tells me that Mr. C. K. Cooke has recently twice found this Cuckoo victimizing the Kurrichane Thrush at Khami, near Bulawayo, where he has examined dozens of this thrush's nests.

On 14th December, 1958 one of these cuckoos was found alone in a *Turdus libonyanus* nest near his house, which is surrounded by forest.

Next year, on 20th December 1959, he found another Kurrichane Thrush's nest in a Jacaranda tree in his garden. Of the two eggs in the nest one was a normal egg for this thrush, but the other one was a very pale green with a few spots. These spots were all alike rusty brown, some very pale and very small; the eggs were not measured.

On the 22nd December one young had hatched. On the 23rd there were two young in the nest, the cuckoo dark skinned and the thrush pink, but on the 24th a cuckoo nestling was the only occupant. On 31st December it became feathered and the orange mouth was noticed, as were the striped breast and spots on the wings and tail. On 20th January it was fully plumaged, with tail growing larger and some signs of red on upper breast. It was later identified as the Red-chested Cuckoo,

On the 1st January it was removed from the nest and was hand fed on a diet of worms and moths. The cuckoo fluttered to the ground on the 15th day from hatching, but was never heard to make the 'Piet-my-Vrou' call, only feeding noises. It started to feed itself on the 20th day, when it could fly strongly, but it flew a little from the 17th day. It was ringed (with a Pretoria Zoo number C.662).

According to Liversidge, *Ostrich* XXVI (1), Feb. 1955, the nestling period of *C. solitarius* is 20 days \pm 6 hours. In the Revised *Roberts' Birds of South Africa*, 1959, the nestling period is given as 17½ to 20 days, which this record also confirms.

Cooke's son taught the cuckoo to fly by making it exercise its wings whilst it was on his hand.

Greater Black-backed Gull with massive infestation of a parasitic worm

by BRYAN L. SAGE AND T. R. LAWSON

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On 19th March 1960, a first-winter Greater Black-backed Gull, *Larus marinus* Linnaeus, was found freshly dead at the King George V Reservoir, Lee Valley, Essex. There was no external evidence of injury to account for the death of the bird, and at post-mortem examination the only abnormal findings were within the abdominal cavity.

The abdominal organs and the anterior abdominal wall were covered with extensive deposits of fat. The peritoneal cavity contained a small quantity of blood-stained fluid. An abscess, about 4 centimetres in diameter, walled off by loops of inflamed intestine, was present on the right side under the liver, and contained blood-stained pus with large numbers of a strigeid (trematode) worm subsequently identified as *Cotylurus platycephalus* (Creplin 1825). In several places the abscess cavity was in direct communication with the lumen of the surrounding gut. The oesophagus was normal, and the stomach, which contained a small quantity of bile-stained fluid, was also normal. The intestinal loops in the vicinity of the abscess were inflamed and *Cotylurus platycephalus* was adherent in large numbers to the mucosal wall from the duodenum to the recto-intestinal junction, with a maximal concentration in the terminal 15 centimetres of the intestine. The intestine, when opened, presented a somewhat similar appearance to that shown in the plate illustrating the paper by Soulsby and Harrison, to which we refer below. The rectum itself was free from infestation.

The bird was a female, with a single ovary measuring approximately 1.3 x 0.4 centimetres. The cause of death was ascribed to peritonitis from an intra-abdominal abscess and enteritis secondary to massive infestation with *Cotylurus platycephalus*.